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FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7894
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY 0446
RUESEN/SKOPJE BETA PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000748

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT ALSO FOR INR/B

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/10/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: THE RETURN OF "BRAT LJUBE" BOSKOVSKI

Classified By: Ambassador Reeker for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

Summary

¶1. (C) Former Interior Minister (and ICTY indictee, acquitted) Ljube Boskovski appears ready to return to politics, most likely as a candidate for president in March elections. He claims to be fully committed to Euro-Atlantic integration and to a multi-ethnic Macedonia. Boskovski asserted that he strongly supports reaching a compromise on the name dispute with Greece ASAP, "as long as our identity is protected." He is fully aware of his bad reputation among the international community, and seeks our approval or at least that we do not condemn his return to politics. End summary.

He's Back

¶2. (C) P/E Chief met Dec 10 with former Interior Minister Ljube Boskovski at his request to discuss Boskovski's political plans. Boskovski triumphantly returned to Macedonia in July from The Hague, where he was acquitted of war crimes allegedly committed during the 2001 conflict. Boskovski and fellow-indictee Johan Tarculovski (who was convicted and sentenced to 12 years, currently under appeal) are causes-celebre among nationalist e-Macedonians, especially PM Gruevski's VMRO-DPMNE.

¶3. (C) However, Boskovski seems eager to distance himself from Gruevski and forge his own path. He spoke glowingly of his own "overwhelming" popularity, and made it clear he plans to enter politics, likely as a candidate in presidential elections in March 2009. Boskovski apparently intends to strike while the iron is hot, noting that political popularity ratings in Macedonia are volatile and he needs to make a move as soon as possible. With parliamentary elections likely about four years away, the presidential race seems like his closest chance. Boskovski has been touring the country and speaking to relatively large crowds in a clear bid to get back into politics.

¶4. (C) Should he run, Boskovski said, he will do so as an independent, not for VMRO (even if asked, which he sees as unlikely in any case). Despite VMRO's apparent popularity, he claimed that he would win 80% of VMRO's votes, especially if -- as many expect -- VMRO runs Deputy PM Zoran Stavreski.

The Politics of Brotherhood...

¶5. (C) Boskovski does not so much present himself as a changed man as one who was never understood. He claims to have always enjoyed good relations with e-Albanians and to support a multi-ethnic Macedonia. Boskovski -- known as

"Brat Ljube" (Brother Ljube) -- hails from Celopek, a village near Tetovo with a mixed population. He claims that e-Albanians in Skopje's Bit Pazar and other places have greeted him warmly, asked for photos, etc. He said he has met with representatives of Menduh Thaci's DPA and New Democracy's Imer Selmani, and even had a cordial chance encounter with DUI minister Musa Xhaferi and MP Ermira Mehmeti. He anticipates that his candidacy would draw many Albanian votes.

...And Euro-Integration

¶6. (C) Boskovski presented himself to us as the candidate of Euro-Atlantic integration. He asserted that Macedonia has no future except in NATO and the EU, and criticized Gruevski for refusing to compromise on the name dispute with Greece. Boskovski told us that crowds have been receptive to his argument that Macedonia can accept a name such as North Macedonia to replace FYROM, "as long as our identity (as Macedonians) is protected."

Seeking International Approval

¶7. (C) Boskovski openly sought our approval for his presidential bid. He appeared to understand that he was in the bad graces of the international community, both because of his role in the 2001 conflict but also what he called the "horrible events" of March 2002 at Rastanski Lozhia, where seven South Asians were killed by Boskovski's Interior Ministry forces. Boskovski at the time claimed the men were

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Islamist terrorists plotting to attack the U.S. Embassy, but the evidence seems to indicate that these were merely illegal migrants transiting the country and set up as "terrorists" and killed in order to please the U.S. in the war on terror. Boskovski told us that MOI intel had told him the men were terrorists and that he believed this to be the case at the time, though now he apparently understands this was not so.

¶8. (C) In an effort to reach out to the international community, Boskovski told us he had met the UK, Turkish, and Bulgarian ambassadors. He plans to travel to Slovenia and Albania, where he plans to meet President Topi and PM Berisha. When we said we were not in the business of endorsing presidential or any other candidates in Macedonia, Boskovski responded that all he asked was that we did not speak out against him. He asserted that a Boskovski presidency would hurt Macedonia only if the country faced international isolation because of who he was, and that if this were to be the case he would not run.

Comment: Macedonia's Next President?

¶9. (C) It is clear that PM Gruevski believes that Boskovski is a political threat, despite having so firmly supported Boskovski during his detention in The Hague and accompanying him home to adoring crowds at Skopje's airport. Gruevski's chief of staff, Martin Protoger, told us recently that Boskovski is behind a group of families of e-Macedonian dead and disabled from the 2001 conflict demanding a huge social benefits package. Protoger made it clear that VMRO cannot control Boskovski and finds him worrisome.

¶10. (C) We will quietly take the temperature here of both e-Albanians and e-Macedonians toward Boskovski as we continue to size him up. Like a number of now-mainstream politicians from both main ethnic communities, Boskovski is barred from travel to the U.S. for activities related to the 2001 conflict. We need to consider carefully how to deal with his return to public life, especially if he becomes Macedonia's next president.

REEKER